

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS  
Washington.

(December 3, 1945)

Letter  
Circular  
LC-812  
(Replaces  
LC-540)

ARTIFICIAL ABRASIVES AND ABRASIVE PRODUCTS

The abrasive industry supplies: (a) abrasive coated paper and cloth for surface finishing; (b) unbonded abrasive (referred to as "abrasive" or as "grain") for grinding, polishing and lapping with loose grain, and for set-up wheels used in surface finishing; and (c) bonded abrasives (referred to as "abrasive products") in the form of wheels or other shapes to be mounted in suitable machines for grinding and finishing.

Manufacture of Abrasive Grain.

Silicon carbide (SiC) was first made in 1891 by E. G. Acheson (1856-1931), who called it "Carborundum," which term has been registered as a trade-mark. The natural mineral is known as moissanite. The crystals, when free to develop, usually form hexagonal plates of limited transparency. The average index of refraction is 2.65, character uniaxial positive, density 3.1, and hardness 9.5 in the Mohs scale. It is characteristically brittle.

Silicon carbide is made in resistance-type electric furnaces. The usual furnace is a brick container which is 45 ft long by 10 ft wide, and 10 ft high. Such a furnace produces 8 to 10 tons of total silicon carbide (97 1/2% SiC) per furnace heat. The furnace described is usually operated at an energy rate of 1500 kilowatts. The normal charge consists approximately of 60% silica and 40% low ash petroleum coke, to which variable amounts of ordinary wood sawdust and sodium chloride are added. The sawdust is added for the purpose of decreasing the density and providing a light porous burden which will permit the large volume of gases generated by the reaction to escape.

After careful mixing of the ingredients the charge is packed around a starting resistor of granular coke approximately 3 ft wide by 1 ft high. At the start of the heat, a relatively high voltage (about 300) is necessary to maintain the energy rate because the internal resistance of the furnace is high. As the temperature rises, the internal resistance of the furnace falls and the voltage required to maintain the specified energy rate may fall below 100. A heat is completed in about 36 hrs.

The most recently published temperature measurements on commercial furnaces have shown that the core temperature may rise as high as 2,600°C (4,710°F), where some of the silicon carbide formed is decomposed into graphite. The limiting lower temperature of the outer zones of the ingot which will produce suitably crystallized silicon carbide is around 2,000°C (3,630°F). The essential reactions in the furnace may be represented by the simple equation  $\text{SiO}_2 + 3 \text{C} = \text{SiC} + 2\text{CO}$ .

Artificial corundum or "fused alumina" ( $\alpha$  -  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ) produced in quantity from bauxite was made possible by the patented process of Chas. B. Jacobs, dated 1897. His patent followed closely on the patents of Werlein in France (1894) and Hasslacher in Germany (1896) for its production from emery or from the purer African ore. It is known commonly as "Alundum," which word also is a registered trade-mark.

It crystallizes in the rhombohedral system, and the crystals are described as uniaxial negative in character, average index of refraction 1.76 +, density 4, and hardness 9 +. The average linear thermal expansion is about  $8.0 \times 10^{-6}$ .

It is produced in steel-lined, water-cooled furnaces of the arc type. An average furnace, 7 1/2 ft in diameter and 6 ft high, will hold sufficient charge in the fused state to produce a "pig" weighing 8 to 10 tons. About 24 hrs, and energy at the rate of from 500 to 800 kw, are required to fuse this amount of material.

It is customary to use a calcined bauxite as the source of alumina for the manufacture of abrasive, from which a material containing about 95% of  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  is produced. A typical calcined bauxite will contain from 75% to 80% of alumina as charged to the furnace, the impurities being 2% to 5% of  $\text{TiO}_2$ , 4% to 8% of  $\text{SiO}_2$ , and 8% to 12% of  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ . Variable amounts of coke and of iron borings are added to the charge to aid in the reduction and separation of the impurities. The coke reduces the impurities (mostly oxides of silicon, iron and titanium) and these, together with the iron added to the batch, form an impure magnetic ferro-silicon which settles to the bottom of the melt.

The cooling of the "pig" must be controlled very carefully to give the type of crystal growth productive of the most advantageous fracturing during the later crushing processes. The wheel manufacturer, for example, desires a grain roughly cubical in shape but with sharp, jagged edges. The manufacturer of coated paper and cloth, on the contrary, desires a grain like a spear point in order to produce a sharper, cleaner-cutting surface.

Another material of greater purity (about 99%  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ ) and decidedly more brittle, may be prepared by refining the mineral corundum or fusing purified bauxite in the form of Bayer alumina, using the same type furnace.



Grain intended for the polishing trade is given a final roasting at about  $650^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $1,200^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) to maintain the "capillarity" of the grain. This is a surface quality which, if not maintained, seriously impairs the adhesion of the glue to the grain.

Boron carbide ( $\text{B}_4\text{C}$ ) is an artificial abrasive which is relatively new in the industry. It was brought out by The Norton Company laboratories in 1934. However, it had been known for many years that a carbide of boron could be made in small quantities and that it had desirable properties. In citing Moissan's original work, the International Critical Tables give the formula as  $\text{B}_6\text{C}$ .

Its hardness is greater than that of silicon carbide, but less than that of the diamond. The density is 2.52, and the coefficient of linear thermal expansion  $4.5 \times 10^{-6}$  or just a little lower than that of  $\text{SiC}$ .

It is made in the resistance-type furnace similar to that used in the  $\text{SiC}$  process, and the raw materials are coke and dehydrated boric acid. Norton Company literature states that the maximum temperature in the furnace is about  $2,750^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $4,980^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), under which condition carbon replaces oxygen in the boric oxide and the resultant combination fuses and recrystallizes to form the abrasive  $\text{B}_4\text{C}$ .

#### Manufacture of Abrasive Products

There are four main classes of bonds (vitrified, silicate, rubber and resin) and two general processes - (casting and pressing).

Casting.--The cast (or puddled) wheel is made with the vitrified bond using either  $\text{SiC}$  or  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  grain. For the  $\text{SiC}$ , a bond relatively low in fluxes is used, probably for two principal reasons: (a) to maintain a low thermal expansion approaching that of the grain; and (b) to prevent breaking down the grain by combination of the fluxes with the  $\text{SiC}$ . An average bond would contain about 45% of feldspar, 20% of flint, and 35% of clay, while a typical bond for the aluminous grain would be about 25% of feldspar, 25% of ordinary clay, and 50% of "slip clay."

The bond, grain, and water are thoroughly mixed in especially designed blungers, and in the deflocculated condition to facilitate removal of air bubbles. After thorough mixing the batch is flocculated, in order to produce sufficient "stiffness" to keep the grain in suspension, and run into sheef iron forms set on plaster slabs, proper allowance being made for shrinkage during drying and later forming. The blanks are next dried, preferably under automatically controlled humidity and temperature, and then "shaved" to their approximate final shape and size on modified potter's wheels. Special contours, recesses, etc., are made at this time.

To duplicate wheels of certain cutting qualities, and obtain freedom from internal stresses, it is of paramount importance that the blanks be heated with the greatest care. Periodic kilns require about 100 hrs to reach the maturing temperature ( $1,250^{\circ}\text{C}$ ,  $2,280^{\circ}\text{F}$ , or higher) following as closely as possible an established heating schedule, and the cooling is carried out with equal care. Consequently, the wheels are in the kiln about 2 weeks. Modern tunnel kilns have decreased this time to 5 or 6 days, partly because of closer temperature control and partly because of the reduction in "kiln furniture."

After removal from the kilns, the wheels are finished to size. This is accomplished with hardened steel conical cutters, and softer wheels may be ground with other wheels of harder grade. Arbors and faces are turned concentric (when necessary the arbors are lead-lined) and the wheels are tested for static and dynamic balance before their final "speed test" prior to shipment.

Pressing.--Vitrified, silicate, rubber and resin-bonded products are made by pressing, or a combination of rolling and pressing. By careful control the pressing of wheels may be utilized to produce rather nice gradations of structure which are not possible by casting. Also, the time saved in drying and machining to size makes this the more desirable method.

The vitrified bond does not differ essentially from that used in the casting process, and the entire procedure is practically the same except that pressing is substituted for the time-consuming steps of casting, drying and shaving.

The silicate-bonded product derives its name from the use of sodium silicate. The grain (usually corundum) is uniformly coated with a mixture of filler (flint, feldspar, clay, etc.), zinc oxide, and silicate; formed in hardened steel molds by tamping, or pressed under 1 or more tons per square inch pressure (similar to the "pressed vitrified process"); dried; and matured in ovens at from  $200$  to  $240^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $390^{\circ}$  to  $465^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) in about 20 hrs. In this bond the zinc oxide enters into combination with the sodium silicate to form an insoluble compound, the composition of which may be  $\text{ZnO} \cdot \text{Na}_2\text{O} \cdot 2\text{SiO}_2$ .

Rubber-bonded wheels are made by thoroughly mixing the grain, pure raw rubber, sufficient sulphur to produce a "hard" vulcanization, fillers, and possibly small additions of special organic chemicals to act as plasticizers and to prevent aging of the rubber. Steam-heated colanders knead the mixture into sheets from which discs of the desired diameter are cut. Thick wheels are made by pressing together a stack of these discs.



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The discs, or wheels, are then vulcanized at about 170°C (340°F) in 8 to 10 hrs. The thin cut-off type of wheel, which is made from a single sheet rolled to the desired thickness, is practically ready for shipment when removed from the vulcanizer. Thicker wheels may require some machining to the required diameter and thickness.

Resin-bonded wheels are of two types--natural resin (shellac) and artificial resin (such as the phenol-formaldehyde condensation products).

The shellac-bonded (or "elastic") product is made in two steps. First the grains are coated in a steam-heated kneading machine with shellac, mixed with rosin or similar adulterants, and with sulphur, talc, plaster or some other fine-grained friable filler; the "gooey" mass is then cooled and crushed. In the second step the coated grains are placed in steel molds of the proper size for the wheel to be made; again brought to a sticky condition by heating; pressed under about 1 ton per square inch; and finally "cured" at about 180°C (355°F), the total heating and cooling cycle being 40 to 50 hrs. (Small shapes, and thin wheels, may be hand- or machine-rolled instead of pressed, and are cured in less time).

The second type of resin-bonded product is commonly referred to as a "Bakelite" wheel. To manufacture such a wheel the grain is wetted with a so-called solvent for the resin and then thoroughly mixed with the powdered resin (which is in an intermediate or "B" state of polymerization and is still thermoplastic) which becomes sticky and uniformly coats the grains. This operation is preferably carried out in an atmosphere of controlled humidity; which observation applies also to the storage of the resin because it is strongly deliquescent and absorbed moisture will affect its properties as well as the qualities of the product.

Having coated the grains, they are next compressed in appropriate steel molds under pressures from 1/2 to 2 tons per square inch, and cured. The curing requires 2 days (heating and cooling) and the maximum temperature is about 200°C (390°F). During this curing the resin is heated sufficiently to cause transition from the "B" to the "C" stage, but higher temperatures would cause charring and must be avoided.

There are dozens of additional bonds (hydraulic and oxychloride cements, and many combinations of varnishes, shellacs, bituminous materials, vitreous enamels, etc.), but they cannot be considered as more than oddities.

All in all, there are about 5,000 possible or regularly used bond and grain combinations. Fortunately, not every grain size is made in every grade or with every bond. Consequently, the actual number of different wheel compositions regularly passing through the plants of the larger manufacturers is approximately 1,400, each of which the producer must be ready to duplicate in quantities of one or of one thousand.

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